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Cover: "The Lotus" by Sharifah Zuriah Aljeffri

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# ARMAH'S MORAL VIEW IN *THE BEAUTYFUL ONES ARE NOT YET BORN*

by

Tang Soo Ping

Much of the impact of Armah's novel lies in the intensity of his moral attitude. His fierce disparagement of Ghana's socio-economic and political life has at times been regarded as excessive and even virulent. Leonard Kibera (1979) has stated that *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is "a work of vengeance" (64), written from a point of view that is coloured by "anger and fastidious guilt" (71).

A closer study of the novel, however, shows that the tone of revulsion is nicely balanced by humour and sympathy. The novel is not without beauty, and this embraces more than that moral ideal to which the protagonist subscribes, that helps to preserve his honour and dignity. D.S.Izevbaye (1975) has written that there is "an active, external beauty whose power makes the beholder's eye a mere receiver of impressions, and a passive ideal beauty hidden in nature and thus challenging the beholder to test his ability to penetrate the object to the beauty beyond" (232). Apart from the meretricious beauty of the life of the gleam and the idea of moral excellence, there is that beauty that resides in humanity itself. The account of human feelings and needs extends and complements the theme of moral discipline and restraint. Human vigour and action help to enact a heart-warming drama that informs and develops the moral perspective.

Armah's attitude in the novel is two-fold; he is moved by a deep moral sense, and he is deeply committed to human life and experience. Ultimately, the two are conjoined, for morality is not an abstraction but is part of the very fabric of daily human conduct, moods and relationships. Often, human experience may conflict with morality, for feelings often contradict the moral ideal, but in Armah's larger vision the two are not mutually exclusive.

Armah's moral concern and his feeling for humanity create a tension that provides for much of the energy and poignancy of the novel. While fantastic visions and hauntings as experienced by the protagonist vividly represent the stress of inner conflict, the scenes satirizing the behaviour of other characters are no less significant, for in these too moral sense and human sympathy converge.

One scene describes the protagonist and his wife going by taxi to Koomson's house. Oyo's careful choice of "a new kind of car" (140) and her determined effort to win the driver's respect and admiration hint of yearnings that have been too long suppressed. The taxi-ride becomes an opportunity to live out her dreams. Armah writes:

> Traveling, even a short ride in a taxi, had a very noticeable effect on Oyo.... she would talk, bringing up the few rich things that had happened to her all her life, and some that had not really happened, some that had not even almost happened, and she would talk about these things as if they were absolutely the only things

that ever happened in her life, a string of fabulous happenings. (141)

This is an intimate and stirring portrayal of urgent human life in all its natural earnestness and unashamed vanity. Yet the warning, though gentle, is unmistakeable; the ordinariness and seeming triviality of the incident emphasize the ease with which corruption imperceptibly wedges in. Ultimately, such ordinary human conduct is seen to parallel the immense atrocities practised by politicians and government officials. It is for this reason that the protagonist does not quite appreciate the humour of Oyo's make-believe. He is too much aware of the implications (not that he himself does not succumb to such indulgence now and then despite his better judgement). Nevertheless, Oyo's yearning and her transparent behaviour have a human appeal that does not quite diminish even with the growing sense of her moral shortcomings.

An even more striking scene is provided in the opening episode of the novel, that presents the bus conductor and his decadent ways. The customary task of arranging and totalling the day's collection becomes a potent symbol of a corrupt and degenerate society. In the man's secret cheating of his passengers and in the latter's blindness and ignorance are also demonstrated the guile and vanity that manifest and contribute to Ghana's predicament. The episode is a dramatic enactment of fraud and false relationship, in which the affected humility and servility of the conductor feed the vanity and desire of the passengers.

The conductor, however, despite his stealth and treachery, is viewed

sympathetically, up to a point at least. The intentness with which he sorts out the money, and the smallness of his profit measured against the trouble he takes to obtain it, point to the pathos of his personal condition. The description of his cunning and deviousness is balanced by a certain sympathy for his entrapment. The spontaneity and sensuality of his response to the sight and smell of the cedi note are almost primitive, pure feeling devoid of all rational thought. He is mesmerized, he absorbs the note with his eyes, he breathes in the very smell of it again and again. As Armah describes it:

> Fascinated, he breathed it slowly into his lungs. It was a most unexpected smell for something so new to have; it was a very old smell, very strong, and very rotten that the stench itself of it came with a curious, satisfying pleasure. (3)

His decadence is viewed in terms of a childlike entrancement. It is only when his concentration is disrupted by the lesser satisfaction of the smell of the coins that the conductor becomes aware of what he is doing, and his pleasure gives way to shame and embarrassment.

The scene highlights the conductor's humanity and insecurity. The unexpectedness of the sight of a passenger, and his immediate tension dramatically establish his shock and subsequent horror and panic. The stillness of the "watcher"(4) shows up by contrast, almost comically, the inner tumult of the conductor. Even when the latter's mood changes to cunning and hope, and then to anger and malice as he realizes that his secret is safe, the poignancy

of his situation remains, is indeed intensified.

The protagonist himself, for all his moral earnestness, succumbs to similar moments of weakness. The intense pleasure he feels in shopping for costly imported food and drinks in preparation for Koomson's visit is an indication of this. Oyo's pretence and the bus conductor's unscrupulousness link up with the man's own vulnerability. If his lapses point to the heroism of his persistent struggle in spite of them, the feeling way in which Oyo's behaviour and the conductor's habits are presented suggests that these other characters and their conduct have also to be seen in perspective, and are not to be condemned outright. In their simple humanity, they speak for that tolerance with which the protagonist is inclined to regard the world around him.

The rhythm of life that Armah captures in these scenes of human weakness conveys an ardour that has to be appreciated. Human yearning and vitality as are felt here argue for themselves. They present a value and a validity all their own, that have little to do with moral worth; they affirm the human state. In the context of Armah's moral concern, however, their appeal seems to suggest an attempt to reconcile morality with human nature, to relate moral ideal to its essentially human environment. Moral excellence then involves a balance between human consideration and moral ideal.

The scenes of pretence and indulgence, however, also convey another point of moral concern. Oyo's desperate clinging to symbols of status and prestige, and the conductor's scathing contempt for the poverty and squalor of the "watcher's" condition demonstrate that ready identification with European culture and

'modernity' that constitutes the deeper tragedy of Ghana's situation. Oyo's choice of "a new kind of car" (140) for her taxi, and her proud references to "cousin Grace" (142) and the postcards received from London and Brussells establish her Western outlook. This European prejudice is already obvious in the bus conductor. His packet of Embassy cigarettes is clearly precious to him, and it is with great reluctance that he opens it to offer one to the "watcher" as a bribe. The abuses he imperiously hurls at the latter, on discovering that the man is harmless, and at the sight of the other's offensive slovenliness, calling him "sonofabitch" and"countryman" (6), are further testimony of this.

The root of the problem is the fact that self-rule for Ghana is merely an extension or a grotesque imitation of colonial rule; the new leaders are those of Ghana's own people who strive to make themselves white. Armah comments:

> In the forest of white men's names, there were the signs that said almost aloud: here lives a black imitator. Mills-Hayford ... Plange-Bannerman ... Attoh-White ... Kuntu-Blankson....
> So this was the real gain. The only real gain. This was the thing for which poor men had fought and shouted. This was what it had come to; not that the whole thing might be overturned and ended, but that a few black men might be pushed closer to their masters, to eat some of the fat into their bellies too. That had been the entire end of it all. (126)

Moral choice and human dignity are ultimately related to the preservation and renewal of native consciousness, both for its own sake and as a means of ensuring a free and dynamic nation, purged of Western decadence. The call for a native consciousness amongst Ghana's rich and Europeanized leaders, however, also confirms Armah's insistence on the need to consider one's human environment. On the national level too, alienation from one's people is morally irresponsible and selfish even as it is politically unhealthy. Teacher's nudity suggests rather starkly, among other things, the necessary return to native attitudes, to an awareness of one's society; it opposes directly the new dress sense rampant among those Ghanaians, who array themselves in clothes "they might have been hoping to use at Governors' Balls on the birthday of the white people's queen...." (81). The protagonist's insistence on walking, that contrasts with the general passion for cars, is also a subtle assertion of the native spirit.

As the novel progresses, Armah's awareness of human nature and his feeling for humanity become increasingly distinct in his protagonist. Indeed, it is this sensitivity that underlies some of the seeming contradictions in the latter's behaviour.

When he raises no objection to Oyo's participation in Koomson's boat-buying deal, the protagonist's passivity seems to suggest a feebleness that questions his very integrity and moral delicacy. If his struggle, limited as it is to a personal conflict, is indicative of the restrictions within which an ordinary man can seek honour and dignity, here at least, in the event of Oyo's proposed venture, is an opportunity for him to bring his convictions

into the open and forcefully assert his beliefs. The man, however, remains silent; he even accompanies his wife to Koomson's house on the day the contract is to be signed. His moral inconsistency relegates his struggle to the kind of hollow gesture that mocks Teacher's whole endeavour.

Later, on another occasion, the protagonist appears to falter even more lamentably in his moral stand; when new leaders assume power in Ghana, he helps Koomson escape the very retribution that his corruption has laid in store for him. Although the new regime is unlikely to be any better than the old, and although renouncing Koomson will not effectively change conditions in Ghana, it is obvious that the protagonist's part in the event hints of a moral lapse. Is he not helping to perpetuate the evil that is threatening to destroy the country? He could hold firmly to his moral principles and make sure that Koomson faces the consequences of his actions. In so doing, the protagonist would at least make a start towards breaking that vicious cycle of corruption; he would help to impress upon his people that success through corruption is short-lived and dangerous.

The protagonist's failure to act as occasion allows, especially when opportunity to do so is so very limited, raises the question whether his passivity does not indicate a lack of moral will. Arguing against this, however, is the fact that his restraint at such moments is related to a capacity to feel with and for others, With Oyo, his silence must stem from a certain sense of guilt or consciousness of his own inability to provide adequately for his family. He does not acquiesce with his wife's desire to work with Koomson, but his family's privations and sufferings must be on his mind as

he quietly watches the progress of that deal. Armah describes the man's thoughts as he and Oyo take their leave of Koomson:

> So how was a man ever going to be able to fight against all the things and all the loved ones who never ceased urging that nothing else mattered, that the way was not important, that the end of life was the getting of these comfortable things? For the self, or if not for the self, then for the loved ones, or the children. Nothing else mattered. (151)

According to Kolawole Ogungbesan (1979) it is Armah's view that "family considerations cannot be a justification for compromising our morality" (105). It is true that the protagonist, for all his anguish, "does not allow the claims of his loved ones to push him into taking the leap into corruption" (105). But if he adheres as firmly to his moral principles as Ogungbesan insists he does, the protagonist would be much less the man that he really is; his hesitation in the face of Oyo's business venture establishes his capacity to care even as it also hints of that perpetual conflict that assails him. Both assert his humanity that essentially gives meaning to his morality. There is, of course, the danger that feeling may be a mere pretext for self-indulgence. The protagonist himself is aware that it is all too easy to make children the justfication for one's own greed:

> Even those who started out with a certain wholeness in their persons, it was funny with what predictability they got themselves

> ready eventually to give up and go. Men have thought they had no use for the sweetness, their own personal selves. But for such men there have been ways to get to the rotten, sweet ways.
> For the children.
> Like a sidelong refrain that phrase jumped to the mind, a remembrance of past conversations with men who had eventually come to the end of their resistance.
> For the children. (145)

However, the event of the man's unhesitating refusal of the bribe offered him earlier at the railway office tends to suggest that greed and moral feebleness are not the reasons for his conduct at this point. The description of his persistent preoccupation with the yearnings of his wife and children in the preceding pages provides the more reasonable explanation.

If doubt still remains over this incident it is surely resolved in the episode where the protagonist effects Koomson's escape.Once again acting on feeling, he subjects himself and his family to grave danger with no prospect of material gain whatsoever. He would have to be a ruthless and vengeful zealot to abandon Koomson to his terrible fate, especially when the latter is already in his house, desperately in need of help. The protagonist's conduct may not seem to contribute to his moral stand, but it clearly affirms his human commitment. Is his role as a feeling person not an essential part of his moral duty? This is the larger moral view that has informed Armah's own attitude towards Oyo and the conductor; it is a view that is now confirmed by his protagonist.

The sign on the back of the bus that greets the protagonist on his return, after he has helped Koomson escape, appropriately proclaims the moral excellence he has achieved, especially in his last act. The flower enclosed in an egg and the word 'Beautyful' signal his personal flowering, his progress to a broader understanding of morality in the human context. The hope that the sign embodies is already fulfilled in one man at least, although the heraldic emblem seems to call for the conversion of Ghana as a whole.

Amidst the pervasive ugliness of vanity and greed, Armah's attitude conveys a tenderness for humanity; he depicts the need for human sympathy in the pursuit of honour and dignity. Morality without feeling mocks itself.

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## EASTER CYCLE 1988

by

Siew-Yue Killingley

### I Opening Questions: Monday 28th March

Alone in an arid plain of peace
My hero bares his soul's release.
'My coming death draws all earthy sorrows;
Was any sorrow like unto my sorrow?'

But how did we, do we, crucify?
Erecting a cross in our arid brain?
Let theologians tortuous doctrines rectify;
I alone pierced soul, nailed his pain.

'Am I your subject, for perspective, line,
With your talents for depiction, so distant,
blind?
You draw from afar, my beauty you mime,
Earth's hell you hide--was ever grief like
mine?'

### II Hidden Hells: Tuesday 29th March

All old, each alone in a private hell
Sprung from the brain's decay, they sit,
Watched by the telly's bright flicker.
One dribbles on her restraining chair;
Another brightly calls out empty orders
In a voice once used to instant obedience,
Commanding, dignified, ignorant of impotence.
A cheerful woman shuffles up to confide
Her reasons for wearing unconventional
footwear--

Non-matching polythene bags over fluffy
slippers--
They would've been valid, if not so impossible;
And equally absurd were my empty responses.
Alone then, each lives on on an arid plane,
Telling her life from a decaying brain.
Waxed old as a garment, each life unfolds
As mere food for moths, and only dust holds.

## III Mary's Picture: Wednesday 30th March

Her hell is hidden too
In folds of heavenly blue
And gorgeous red and gold,
A mother never old.

Unlike those life-lost ladies
Smelling of age, with wrinkled faces,
She's composed in youth and beauty,
Elegant, unsoiled by mother's duty.

So winning is her radiant portrayal,
Her child enfolded, no hint of betrayal,
We're charmed into seeing nothing there
But love and joy in the idealized pair.

Love and joy indeed came in,
But joy was crushed by others' sin;
From her arms unfolded her love's decline:
'Was ever mother's grief like mine?'

## IV Son and Mother: Wednesday 30th March

Weighed down by silence and the yoke
Of their bond, they never spoke.
But plodded daily side by side
Shopping for things like 'Mother's Pride'.

What was it then that bound them fast?
Some moth-eaten memory of the past?
Did love and joy wear down at last
To this last tribute to their past?

Neither questions why they're together,
This ageing son with his ancient mother.
Waxed old as a garment, their life unfolds,
As mere food for moths, and only dust holds.

## V More and More Pictures: Maundy Thursday, 31st March

Watch. Can a camera crucify,
Capturing all with cruel eye,
Snapping up food for breakfast news,
As heart's horrors brightly it reviews?
It beams a gorgeous robe of pain
On screens that lightly glance our brain.
No hidden hells here, the camera can't lie
Like the artist; but it can casually crucify.

## VI The Mourners: Maundy Thursday, 31st March

One had lost her son in the war;
Another had some unspeakable sorrow;
Others clasped friends in fixed poses
Of pain forever frozen in my brain.
Some were dead and should be decently covered,
But were resurrected for the world to view.
Speechless, frozen, these stills are stolen
From subjects whose griefs once had meaning
Now erased in these bland tokens of betrayal.

## VII The Son's Mothers: Good Friday, 1st May

Not in the way of men who tire
Of their loves grown old, did he give
His mother away. Those men conspire
To bury joys, never to relive
In brain a moth memory of their chosen.

Not in the way of a child grown cold
To the trappings of home, did he flee
From his past. That child recasts old
Joys as oppression, in order to free
Moth memory for the new life chosen.

But in the way of one who loses
All to gain, he remembered her virgin loss,
Her youth's joy strewn among lilies and roses;
And straining to wean her from his cross,
Gave her away to the love he had chosen.

Her rose stem has grown, a broken reed
Bruised in the wind and wounded on rood;
Her lithe lily's limbs are draped on rood;
Her live lily now limp, a wind-bruised reed.

## VIII New Mourners: Easter Even, 2nd May

The sun shines, and falls on the wreath
Ringing her coffin with the last toll of summer,
Red roses on green, only the wood beneath
Reminding the mourners of their hearts' new
winter.

The resurrection confounds me, as does light
Perpetual shining, and resting in peace,
Odd contradictions which in new mourners' night
Are mere words too baffling for grief's release.

In the bare presence of that shining wood,
Hollow and sounding the depth of death,
Doctrines are disturbing; what is understood
Goes beyond words, the mere sounding of breath.

## IX Closing Questions: Easter Sunday, 3rd May

He lay alone behind the stone,
Still with the cold of my very own
Denials. Who has come to bare my hero;
Was ever sorrow like unto my sorrow?

If even Christ's rock was gravely shaken,
How shall I withstand 'From death awaken!'?
Are they mere words to wind up my brain,
Shrouding God's truth, since death is so plain?

I tried to draw you, my subject, mine,
With talons of love, like the eagle the dove.
If you can bear such an impossible love,
Easter in me. Let your joy be mine.

## X Last Things: Monday, 4th May

After the endless preparations after a death,
Communing with the undertaker, with his special
speech,
His tactful references to the newly deceased--
No unseemly bodies arise in our strange
conversation--
In another guise and setting, say at Christmas,
He might well have said 'Compliments of the
season.'
Then composing the advertisement, ringing
relations
Out of mind from year's end to year's end,

Saying and hearing the usual things of death's
season,
One fills the days to filling the front pew.

And then perhaps a real parting of the ways,
Death no longer an abstraction, in a solid
coffin
Boxing in all ways of escape from the truth
Of one's loss, communing with the speech
Of death in the service, the hymns and responses
Jerked out of almost strangers in that front
pew.

I have seen and I have believed
That death nails us to the truth of loss.
How can I blame Thomas, whose senses
Demanded some other thing than mere speech,
Some special communing after that cruel cross?
Yet I still say goodbye with the sign of the
cross.

# VERB-FORM ERRORS AND THEIR POSSIBLE CAUSES: A CASE STUDY FROM MALAYSIA

by

H. Hepburn

This paper sets out to examine errors made in the connected writing of students in a Malaysian School. From an examination of these errors, possible causes were postulated. These causes were then used in an attempt to establish principles which would allow the learner to process the learning material in an orderly way, thus making for greater ease of storage, retrieval, reproduction, as well as creativity. The paper consists of two sections:

Section A : Reasons for using only the verb phrase for analysis.

Section B : (1) An analysis of the errors in the verb phrase.

(2) A statement on the possible causes of error.

## Section A

## The Theory and Method of analysis of the errors in the Verb Phrases

### Reasons for using errors in the verb phrase

This study is concerned with errors in the verb phrase found in the connected writing of pupils in the lower school (years I - III) in S.T.A.R.[1] An error in defined as a non-standard form occurring in the English of the pupils. A full-scale analysis of errors would, of course, be time-consuming and so it was decided to use, as a sample measure, the occurrence of errors in the verb phrase only for the following reasons:

(i) Errors in the verb phrase are especially significant because of the role the verb phrase plays in the language learning process. "The most difficult part of any language is usually the part that deals with the verb. Learning a language is to a very large degree learning how to operate the verbal forms of that language ...." (Palmer 1965: 1).

(ii) It is also considered that the verb phrase plays an important function in the form and shape of sentences in connected writing. "Formally, the verb can be seen as the pivot of the English sentence in that most sentences contain a finite verb, and that the choice of verbs, to a large extent determines the structure of the sentence. For instance, in the broadest sense, when we speak of

'transitive' verbs we are essentially referring to the sentence pattern (S) V O. When we speak of 'non-transitive' verbs we are referring to the (S) V sentence pattern." (McEldowney 1976).

(iii) The errors in the verb phrase significantly outweigh errors in any other area, as for example in the noun phrase. A rough, initial sample count indicated that errors in the verb phrase formed more than half the errors noted and the next largest group, the noun phrase, less than a third. Hence, as an area of major error, it was felt that the verb phrase required a more detailed examination.

Identification of the Errors

The errors were identified by the writer and samples checked by two other judges.

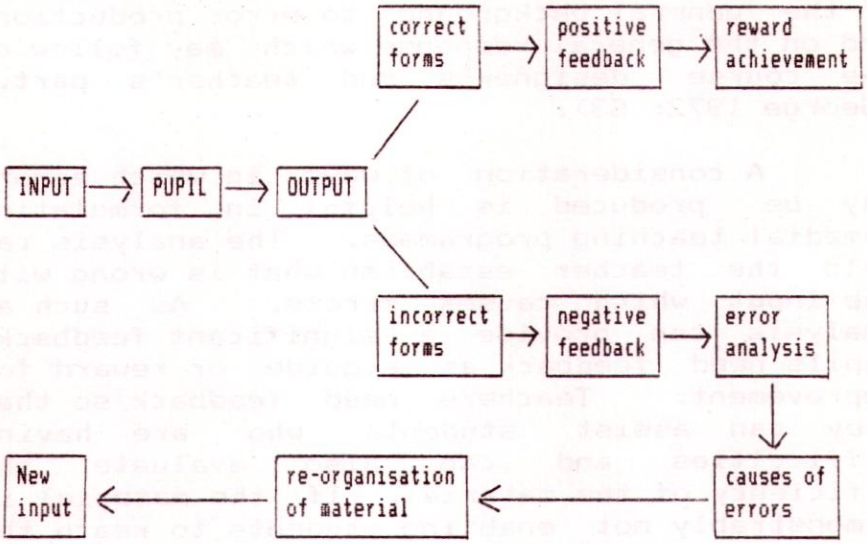
The Method used to classify the errors

The errors in the verb phrase were classified in terms of omission, of form, wrong form and insertion of form, though the last group (insertion) formed so small a group (3.1%) as to be quite insignificant.

The errors were classified in this way as it is consistent with the concepts of interference and redundancy which factors have been used (e.g. George H. V.) to explain possible causes of error. The reasons suggested for the causes of errors could be used to re-organise the input materials in a teaching or remedial teaching programme, or any other

remedial measure, so that errors could be corrected and prevented from recurring. "We have laid stress on the need for comprehension of the general background to error production; and on the general response which may follow on the course designer's and teacher's part." (George 1972: 63).

A consideration of ways in which errors may be produced is helpful in formulating remedial teaching programmes. The analysis can help the teacher establish what is wrong with the input which causes errors. As such an analysis can provide a significant feedback. Pupils need feedback as a guide or reward for improvement. Teachers need feedback so that they can assist students who are having difficulties and can also evaluate the efficiency of the material. If the material is demonstrably not enabling students to reach the necessary goals, then revision and supplementation is required. However, the material for remedial work should be carefully selected. It should be based on the criterion of importance, usefulness, frequency and causes of error so that the material may then be re-organised in a way that will avoid errors such as cross-association, false-analogy or any other type of interference. The situation may be shown by the diagram below.




Accordingly, errors in the verb phrase are classified in terms of omission, wrong form and insertion.

N.B. Please see Appendix 1 for the task set for the pupils.

## Section B

### 1. Analysis of the type of error found in the verb phrase

Of the total number of errors, those concerned with wrong form constituted the largest group accounting for 72.5% of all errors, with errors of omission accounting for 24.4% and insertion a mere 3.1%. The figures are shown in table 1.

Table 1 Percentage of Errors

| Errors | Wrong Form | Omission | Insertion |
|---|---|---|---|
| % | 72.5 | 24.4 | 3.1 |

Within the wrong form group of errors, the area of greatest error lay in the forms connected with the stem + ed form of single verbs which group accounted for almost 35% of all errors. Errors of the stem + ed form in the verb groups totalled 27.9%. In the omission group, the errors in the stem + ed form of single verbs, alone accounted for half the errors in that group, i.e. 14.6% while errors in the verb groups totalled 7.2%. These figures are shown in table 2.

From table 2 it is clear that errors in verb groups are the two largest groups of error and account for nearly 80% of all errors. Hence they are singled out for further attention so that remedial measures may be considered. As errors of insertion form so small a group (3.1%) as to be quite insignificant, that group did not form part of the analysis.

Table 2

Major Groups of Error

| Errors | Stem + -ed (single verbs) | Verb Groups | Wrong Verb | Complex Phrase | Others |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Wrong Form | 34.8% | 20.7% | 8.3% | 5.4% | 3.5% |
| Omission | 16.4% | 7.2% | - | - | 2.6% |
| Insertion | - | - | - | - | 3.1% |
| Totals | 49.4% | 27.9% | 8.3% | 5.4% | 9.0% |

## 1. Errors of Wrong Form

### A Errors of Wrong Form with simple finite verbs

Table 3

| Type | | Number | % of all errors |
|---|---|---|---|
| A. | Wrong Form with simple finite verbs | 295 | 46.4 |
| 1. | Use of 'stem' for irregular stem + ed | 121 | 19 |
| 2. | Use of stem + s for irregular stem + ed | 33 | 5.2 |
| 3. | Use of stem + s for irregular stem + ed | 12 | 1.9 |
| 4. | Use of be (present) for be (past) | 41 | 6.5 |
| 5. | Use of have (present) for have (past) | 4 | 0.6 |
| 6. | Use of wrong stem + ed form | 10 | 1.6 |
| 7. | Use of wrong verb | 53 | 8.3 |
| 8. | Lack of Cocord | 15 | 1.4 |
| 9. | Use of wrong form of modal | 6 | 0.9 |

Key

1. Use of stem for irregular stem + -ed (19%)

   e.g. One day Pak Dollah wake up late.

2. Use of stem + -s for irregular stem + -ed (5.2%)

   e.g. After that he goes back into his house.

3. Use of stem + -s for regular stem + ed (1.9%)

   e.g. He looks up and saw many crows.

4. Use of 'be' (present) for 'be' (past) (6.5%)

   e.g. The old man told him that is a crazy thing to do.

5. Use of 'have' (present) for 'have' (past) (0.6%)

   e.g. Then he has an idea.

6. Use of wrong form of stem + -ed (1.6%)

   e.g. He shaked the tree.

7. Use of wrong verbs (8.3%)

   e.g. Near his house has a big tree.

8. Lack of concord (2.4%)

   e.g. The birds was on his house.

9. Wrong form of modal (0.9%)

e.g. .... hit it as hard as he <u>can</u>.

(i) Verb error categories 1, 2, 4 produced the greatest number of errors.

(ii) Four of the categories (2, 3, 4, 5) all deal with the use of the present tense forms for the past tense forms.

B. <u>Errors of Wrong Form with the Verb groups</u>

The error scores for the verb groups are shown in table 4.

<u>Table 4</u>

B. <u>Wrong form with verb groups</u>

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | <u>Wrong finite form in verb-groups</u> | 105 | 16.4% |
| (i) | Use of <u>be</u> present for <u>be</u> past (2-1 verb group) | 3 | |
| (ii) | Use of <u>be</u> present for <u>be</u> past (3-1 verb group) | 27 | |
| (iii) | Use of <u>have</u> present for <u>have</u> past (4-1 verb group) | 10 | |
| (iv) | Use of <u>modal</u> present for <u>modal</u> past (5-1 verb group) | 38 | |
| (v) | Use of wrong verb | 11 | |
| (iv) | Lack of concord | 16 | |

The finite group may be broken up into the following categories. The figures in brackets are percentage figures within each group.

(i) and (ii) Use of 'be' (present) for 'be' (past) (29%)

e.g. ..... to see what is going on .....

(iii) Use of 'have' (present) for 'Have' (past) (9.5%)

e.g. ..... because the crow have maked a lot of noise.

(iv) Use of 'modal' (present) for 'modal' (past) 36%)

e.g. He cannot make the crows fly away.

(v) Use of wrong verb (19.5%)

e.g. The gong which he was bought from the shop.

(vi) Lack of concord (15%)

e.g. Some birds was quarrelling.

The figures in brackets indicate the percentage figures for the various categories within the finite group. It is also noted that the major errors involved the use of the present tense forms for the past tense, these categories of (i), (ii) and (iii) accounting for some 75% of the errors in the finite group.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2. | Wrong non-finite form in verb groups | 27 | 4.3% |
| (i) | Use of stem + ed for non-finite stem | 12 | |
| (ii) | Use of stem + ed for non-finite stem + ed | 4 | |
| (iii) | Use of stem + ed for non-finite stem + ing | 7 | |
| (iv) | Use of stem for non-finite stem + ed | 2 | |
| (v) | Use of stem + ing for non-finite stem + ed | 2 | |

The non-finite group may be broken down into the following categories:

(i) Use of 'stem + ed' for non-finite stem (45%)

e.g. The did not flew away.

(ii) Use of 'stem + ed' for non-finite stem + ed

e.g. They have never saw.

(iii) Use of 'stem + ed' for non-finite stem + ing (25%)

e.g. ... by people who were passed by.

(iv) Use of stem for non-finite stem + ed (7.5%)

e.g. ... noise that was make by birds.

(v) Use of stem + ing for non-finite stem + ed (7.5%)

From these figures it is noted that all the errors involved the mis-use of the stem + ed form, category (1), however, with 45% of the errors having the highest rating in this group.

What emerges from the above description is that in the finite verb groups the main problem lies with the mis-use of the present tense forms for the past while in the non-finite group, the main problem is the mis-use of the stem + ed forms.

## C. Other major areas of error of Wrong Form

Two other areas of error appear to be large enough to warrant comment, namely those dealing with the use of the wrong verb and wrong non-finite form in complex phrases respectively, each accounting for 8.3% and 5.4% of all errors as shown in table 5.

Table 5

C. Wrong form with complex verb phrases

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 12. | Wrong non-finite form in complex verb phrases | 34 | 5.4% |
| (i) | Use of stem + ed for non-finite stem + ing | 19 | |
| (ii) | Use of stem + ed for stem | 15 | |

(i) Use of the wrong verb

The majority of the errors stem from the verbs connected with striking the gong and the noise the gong made. Such errors accounted for over 50% of the errors in this group.

Examples are:

(a) ... and asked him why he knock the gong.

(b) ... and he knot that gong ...

(c) ... and he waplaped the gong ...

(d) ... and the gong resulted loudly.

Broken down in this way, the errors do not appear to be as serious as would appear at first sight and will hence be ignored in the section on comment.

(ii) Use of the wrong non-finite form complex phrases

Errors in this group are of two kinds:

(a) Use of the 'stem ed' form for the non-finite 'stem + ing'

These are associated with the verbs of sensation - see, hear and the verb stop e.g. (1) The crowd stop made noise: (2) heard a noise came from outside.

(b) Use of 'stem + -ed' form for the non-finite stem

These are associated with the causative verbs e.g. make, want, in that the subject of the first verb is instrumental in influencing the action of the subject of the second verb, e.g. (i) ... and tried to make the birds flew away. (2) The crowds wanted to fought with each other.

2. Errors of Omission

Errors of omission accounted for 24.4% of all errors. The two largest types of error within this group were:

(a) Omission of -ed inflections with simple finite verbs.

(b) Omission in the verb groups.

These two categories accounted for over 80% of the errors in this group and will be further

examined to see if they reveal patterns not previously noted.

A. Errors of Omission with Simple finite verbs

Table 6

| | Type | Number | % of all errors |
|---|---|---|---|
| A. | Omission with simple finite verbs | 107 | 17.2% |
| 13. | Omission of 'ed' inflection | 91 | 14.6% |
| 14. | Omission of finite verb word | 16 | 2.6% |

Translated into error categories, this group produced examples such as:

13. Omission of -'ed' inflections:
The passenger look at Ah Meng.
This type of error formed the largest group in the section as shown in table 6.

B. Errors of omission in the -Verb groups

Errors in the verb groups are shown in table 7 below.

Table 7

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| B. | Omission with verb groups | 45 | 7.2% |
| 15. | Omission of finite forms in verb groups | 23 | 3.6% |
| | (i) Omission of modal form (5-1 verb group) | 5 | |
| | (ii) Omission of have (4-1 verb group) | 5 | |
| | (iii) Omission of be (3-1 verb group) | 9 | |
| | (iv) Omission of be (2-1 verb group) | 4 | |
| 16. | Omission of non-finite forms in verb groups | 22 | 3.6% |
| | (i) Omission of verb groups | 2 | |
| | (ii) Omission of -ed inflections (4-1 verb group) | 6 | |
| | (iii) Omission of -ed inflections (2-1 verb group) | 7 | |
| | (iv) Omission of -ing inflection (3-1 verb group) | 7 | |

(i) The greatest areas of error in the Wrong Form group lay with the mis-use of the past tense forms where the present tense forms were used instead to a large degree; and the verb groups where similar

problems were encountered.

(ii) The greatest area of error in the Omission group lay with the omission of the -ed inflections and with the verb groups where the -ed inflection also created problems.

## 2. Comment on the Findings

### Possible Causes of the Errors

Any comment on the causes of the errors noted is prefaced with the caution that "an explanation is offered by way of hypothesis only, in the given circumstances even taking into consideration the context in which it (the error) occurs, it can at best only be guessed at." (Ho Waw Kam 1973). Hence no certainty is claimed, only a likely cause especially as one cannot be sure if an error has one or more causes.

The two main classes of error appear to be:

(i) Those showing lack of knowledge of formation of verb groups e.g.

(a) Then the ambulance is coming.

(b) The birds were fly to the sky.

(ii) Those showing lack of knowledge of the function of the verb forms resulting in the selection of wrong forms, e.g.
(a) It waked up the whole neighbourhood.

(b) He looks up and saw many crows.

(iii) Those showing lack of knowledge of the formation of complex verb phrases, e.g.

(a) The birds stop made noise.

(b) They saw him tried to ....

Looking at the errors and the syllabus it may be said that the pupils have learned the verb are as "a complex network of mood tense and aspect." (George 1972: 185). Hence they do not perceive the simple, formal relationships and nor are they able to associate forms with corresponding functions and functions with the corresponding form.

Errors of Omission

In terms of omission the greatest number of errors occurred in the omission of the -ed inflection which inflection is seen as 'redundant' in that omission of the item still renders the message comprehensible. This redundancy is due to a pupil's previous experience of language which may interfere with his present and future experience of the language. The syllabus teaches the stem form of verbs first but teaching stem form verbs (I like mangoes) before stem + -s forms (He likes mangoes) imprints the stem form on the learner's mind and makes future acceptance of inflections difficult in that they are seen as being redundant.

This redundancy is further enhanced by using adverbials to mark present or past tenses or an action as advocated by the Secondary School Handbook, part 1 on page 62 "The presentation and practice of this tense (simple

past) should begin with the use of adverbials of past time." The uses of such markers at that stage makes the -ed inflection insignificant and redundant as the pupil's attention is drawn to the time-markers, as a result of which there is a tendency to omit the -ed inflection and produce sentences such as "The passengers look at Ah Meng."

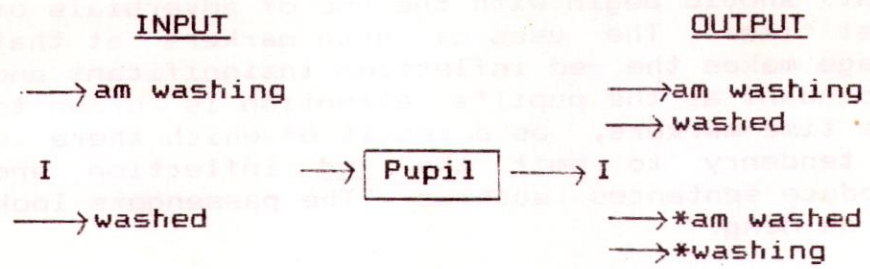
In addition, verbal inflections do not exist in Malay to distinguish between the present and past forms of an action, these being expressed by the use of time adverbials. Then the verb 'be' is rarely used in Malay as this example illustrates: "Saya Ali" which translated literally is "I Ali." In English the verb 'be' has eight forms and the demands of the learning load lead to its omission by students who produced error such as "Pak Mat very surprised."

The technique of teaching by contrast allows errors of cross-associations to occur. The following is an extract from the dialogue used to present the past tenses of regular verbs in item 65 of the Primary Syllabus.

"Aziz. Now I'm washing my face.

Ali. I washed my face at six o'clock."

By feeding the underlined parts as forms to the pupils in the way shown, the pupil is liable to produce four forms, two of which are incorrect viz:




Among the errors noted in the sample were examples of the following type. "People came to see what happening".

The practice of using negative and interrogative patterns at too early a stage is also error-inducing. For example, item 65 introduces the past tense forms for the first time yet by item 68 the following practice is recommended.

"Teacher : Alexander combed his hair.

Group A : Did Alexander comb his hair?"

In the next item i.e. 69, there appears this extract from the dialogue practice.

"A - Did you help your mother yesterday?

B - No, I didn't help her, but my sister did."

Drills based on transformation exercises such as the above lead to pupils omitting the -ed inflection because the repeated intrusion of the

stem form of the verb in questions and negative statements, acts as a distractor to the establishment of the -ed forms. Errors such as "When he open his door" were frequent in the corpus of errors. In any case, the use of question forms in such contexts is a mis-use of the function of the question form which should be used to elicit information and not as a technique in a transformation exercise to elicit statements.

Then there is also the technique of presenting was as a past-time marker and is as a present time marker. Thus item 67 uses "There was a piece of paper on the floor. Now it is in the basket." This leads pupils to use was as a past-tense marker with stem form verbs, e.g. "The birds was frighten by him."

This same error also indicates confusion about finite and non-finite forms in verb groups, possibly because they have not been well enough established. The items in a verb group occur in a fixed order which may be represented numerically 5 4 3 2 1. The following table shows the items which may occupy the various positions.

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Modals | have | be | be | stem |
| can<br>may etc | finite/<br>non-finite<br>forms except<br>non-finite<br>had | finite/<br>non finite<br>forms | finite/<br>non finite<br>forms<br>(passive) | stem+-ed/-en<br>stem + -ing |

Within a verb group, the forms of each item depends on the item preceding it. Thus an item in:

position 5 is followed by stem

4 is followed by stem + -ed/-en

3 is followed by stem + -ing

2 is followed by stem + -ed

Examples are:

(i) I missed seeing John, but he will return.

verb group: will come

verb order: 5 1

(ii) He must have been sleeping all the time.

verb group: must have been sleeping

verb order: 5 4 3 1

My final point about errors in omission is that one error may have several causes. For example, the sentence "The birds was stop" can have at least four causes attributed to it:

(i) Lack of concord between birds and was.

(ii) Inflections are non-existent in Malay i.e. mother-tongue inference.

(iii) Was is used as a past tense marker.

(iv) Formal verb group patterns have not been properly established.

Errors of Wrong Form

In terms of the errors of wrong form, the greatest area lay with the stem + -ed forms, especially with the irregular verbs which suggests a direct relationship with the learning load. The main errors lay with verbs which:

(i) have no change of form - beat, hit

(ii) require the change of the final consonant of the stem to/d/

e.g. have-had; make-made.

(iii) require the change of the stem vowels and the addition of /t/

e.g. sleep - slept

(iv) require the change of the stem vowel to /ɔ/ + /t/

e.g. think-thought; bring-brought.

(v) require the change of the stem vowel +/d/

e.g. do-did; hear-heard.

(vi) have a different form from the stem

e.g. am/is/are; was/were; go/went.

Irregular verbs are an area of great complexity and learning necessitates a great learning effort. The problem is compounded if the irregular verbs are not carefully controlled and taught because storage, retrieval and prediction of them becomes difficult. With such a complex network or irregular forms, Malay

pupils simplify the verb system by regularizing irregular forms e.g. *hitted and *maked.

Then the practice of using pictures for narration can also mislead pupils into using the wrong forms. "Having said there is no excuse for using the present tense for narration, I must add there is a reason. It has to do with the use of pictures. A series of pictures, as in a comic strip can illustrate a series of events - a narrative. But a single picture is in itself static, so the events shown in it are seen to be happening now and the features in it are seen to obtain new or even to be timeless because the picture cannot change. ..... . In stories, the tendency of any text referring to a picture is to describe the picture (rather than get on with the story as if the picture were not there) and therefore switch to the present tense." (Abbot 1979). It is noted that such errors accounted for 14% of all errors.

There is also a tendency to use unreal contrasts to teach language items. In item 67 under "Presentation and Practice" there occurs this extract:

> They were on the table but now they are in the cupboard. Pronunciation note: were and now are stressed to emphasize the contrast.

Such a situation invites cross-association between the uses the present (be) and the past (be), the learner using one for the other. Thus in the corpus of errors there appeared:

"He is angry" for "He was angry" and "Then I go into my house" for "Then I went into my house."

The technique of contrast allows further error by cross-association. Hence this extract from item 65 uses the following contrasting forms:

"Aziz. Now I'm combing my hair.

Ali. Oh, hurry up. I combed my hair at six o'clock."

By combining combed and am ('m) combing errors such as *I am combed my hair can occur. One example from the errors found was of the type

*"It looked like they were quarrelled."

This type of error plus the type "They have came" is also related to confusion between finite and non-finite forms in verb groups. Reasons for this type of error have already been indicated in the section on errors of omission and need not be repeated here.

The present continuous form receives a great deal of emphasis at the primary level which together with its presentation in the form of describing a series of actions (I am walking to the board. Now I am writing on the board.) leads to the assumption that the stem + -ing form is used for describing sequences of events. Hence errors such as

"Then the police is coming" appear.

Richards (1972: 180) points out how George H. V. has indicated a type of error arising from the situation where the simple and continuous forms are established in the following way:

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| is | = | present state | is + -ing | = | present action |
| was | = | past state | was + -ing | = | past action |

The pupils then use was and -ing as past tense markers so that there appear errors of the kind "Then the ambulance was coming."

Errors of false analogy are also apparent. In item 68 there appears the following recommended practice.

"Teacher : Alexander combed his hair.

Group A : Did Alexander comb his hair?

Group B : Yes, he did.

Note: Be alert for an error such as:

"Did Ali walked to the cupboard?"

Yet this error is "analogically justified" (George 1972: 149) if the sequence taught is the simple present statement and question form followed by the simple past and question forms. This sequence is outlined in the Handbook and may be shown thus:

You walk ⟶ Do you walk?
↓
You walked ⟶ *Did you walked?

One error found was of the type *They did not flew away which can be traced as follows:

They fly away. ⟶ They do not fly away.
↓
They flew away. ⟶ *They did not flew away.

There is also a group of verbs which may be called catenatives or complex verb phrases with which students are not familiar

e.g. They stopped making a noise.

Earlier in this section a 5 4 3 2 1 set of rules was suggested for the verb groups, rules being understood as 'directions for use.' Equally for complex phrases students need to see that an English verb can have as many as five forms.

| Finite | | | Non-finite | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| stem | stem + s | stem + ed | stem | stem + ing | stem + ed |
| eat | eats | ate | sat | eating | eaten |
| become | becomes | became | become | becoming | become |

A useful rule is that when two verb forms occur one after the other (without a particle such as 'to' or a conjunction such as 'and') the second form usually comes from a different column. For example in "John likes eating fish," likes comes from column 2 (finite) and eating comes from column 5 (non-finite) which is a different column.

Similarly in "They became frightened" became comes from column 3 (finite) and frightened from column 6 (non-finite).

Such a 'rule' does not account for every

phrase but it does cover many of the catenatives which the pupils are likely to use. With this rule to help them, they may be right more often than wrong.

Summary of the causes of Error

Having discussed possible causes of the significant errors found in the connected writing of the pupils, it may be suggested that the main causes of error are due to:

1. Uncertainty about the use of different verb forms,

2. Lack of knowledge of the formation of verb groups,

3. Faulty presentation leading to cross-association between forms,

4. False analogy,

5. Perception of redundancy in verb endings and verb words,

6. Overgeneralisation, often due to mother-tongue interference,

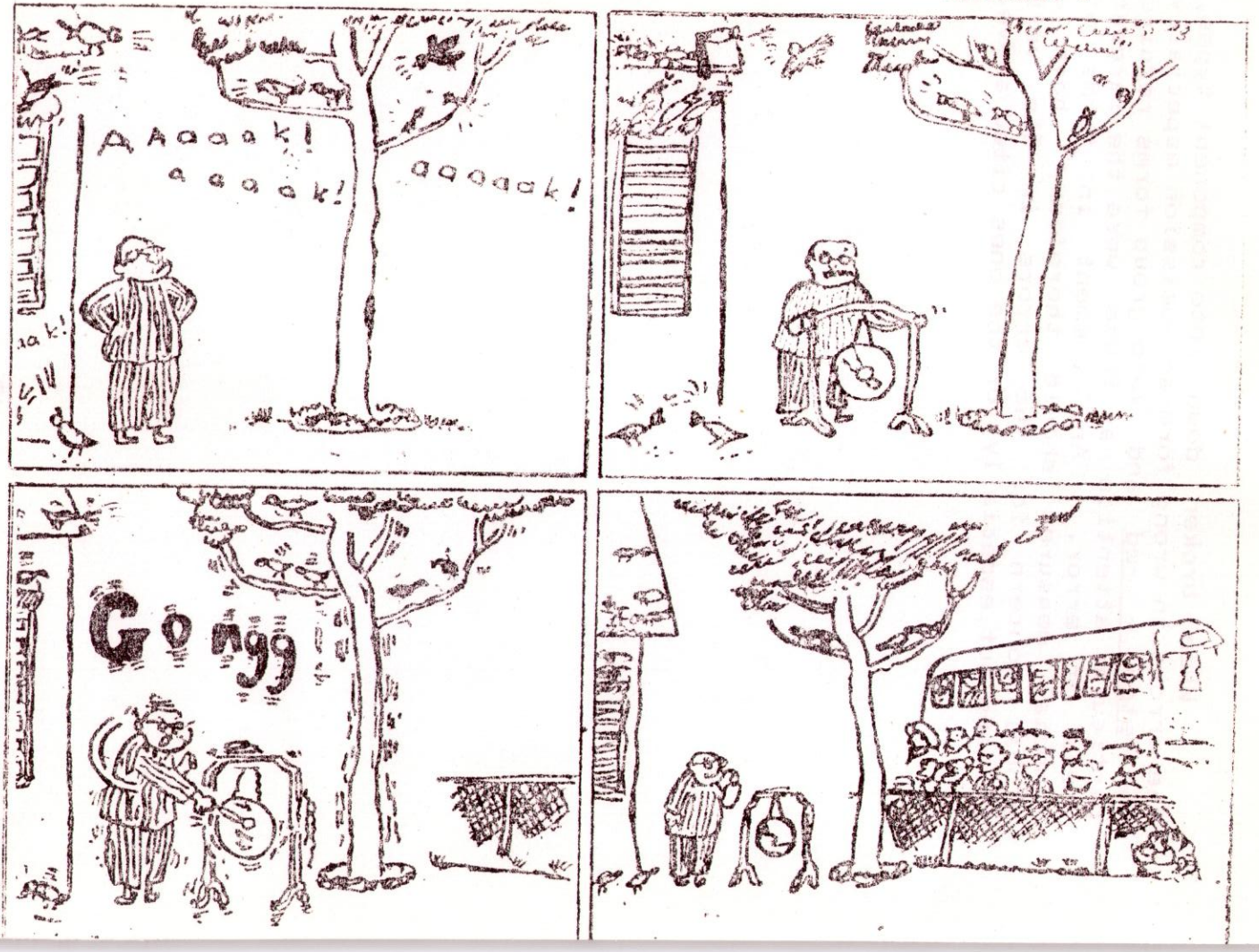
7. Interference of past learning with the present,

8. Use of pictures for the task set.

As one cannot be certain about the cause of an error or that an error does not have more than one cause, certainty is not claimed here; only a likely cause.

When broken down into component types, the errors in wrong form an omission especially the stem + -ed and verb group forms require particular attention as these were the largest areas of error. Any comment in terms of remedial measures should therefore, have a global concern for the errors in the verb phrases but especially for the ones cited above.

APPENDIX 1



Question 2

(Write your answer on a new piece of paper)

Study the four pictures by Lat which you have been given.

Then tell the story of the pictures in about 100 words. Do not write much more than this.

## NOTES

[1]STAR: Sekolah Tunku Abdul Rahman, a residential science school in Ipoh, Perak in Malaysia.

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# *TROILUS AND CRESSIDA* AND *EVERY MAN OUT OF HIS HUMOUR*

by

Fadzilah Amin

The influence of Jonson's and Marston's "comicall satyres" in general and Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour* in particular, on Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, has been noted by several critics -- although there is no general agreement as to the nature and extent of this influence. O. J. Campbell [1943:98] for instance, argues that *Troilus and Cressida* is Shakespeare's "conscious imitation" but "highly original version of ... the comicall satyre of Jonson and Marston" [1942:120].[1] R. A. Foakes [1971:44] sees a more limited indebtedness:

> It is to simplify too crudely to suppose that Shakespeare wrote this play directly within a convention of 'comical satire' as established by Jonson, but it does seem clear that he learned much from Jonson and Marston, using techniques they had developed in a rich and subtle expansion of the satirical mode.

This essay proposes to examine two elements in *Troilus and Cressida* that seem to

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[1]See also Campbell's earlier book *'Comicall Satyre' and Shakespeare's 'Troilus and Cressida'* San Marino, California 1938.

have owed their origins wholly or partly to elements in Jonson's *Every Man Out*. The first element is the attempt by Ulysses and the other Greek leaders to dishumour.[2] Achilles of his pride and arrogance; the second is the figure of Thersites, the satiric commentator. The writer hopes to demonstrate, through this examination, that Shakespeare's treatment of these two elements not only shows the influence of Jonson's satiric technique as developed in *Every Man Out*, but also contains a questioning of the validity and effectiveness of this technique -- and, by extension, the validity and effectiveness of satire itself.

Both Campbell[3] and Foakes[4] see similarities between Carlo Buffone of *Every Man Out* and Thersites of *Troilus and Cressida*. Foakes goes even further in his comparisons of characters from these two plays. He sees Ulysses as Shakespeare's variation of Jonson's Asper and Achilles and Ajax as variations of Macilente[5], although he is later to modify this equation [1971:49]

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[2]Throughout this essay, I shall be using this word to mean "to drive a (Jonsonian) humour out of someone", i.e. in the sense Macilente of *Every Man Out* uses it in v, iii, 76, "... here were a couple unexpectedly dishumour'd ..."

[3]See O. J. Campbell, p. 106, "He is a railer, a detractor, and a buffoon in exactly the same sense as was Carlo Buffone ..."

[4]See R. A. Foakes, p. 44, "Carlo Buffone is translated into Thersites ..."

[5]Ibid.

> ... [Achilles] may be seen ... as standing to Asper-Ulysses like one of Jonson's humour characters; Ulysses endeavours to bring Achilles out of his humour of surly pride, and only succeeds in bringing Ajax into the same condition ...

As far as the attempt to 'dishumour' Achilles is concerned, Ulysses' role more resembles that of Macilente: they are both the chief intriguers in their respective plays. Achilles' role, here, as Foakes says, resembles that of one of the humour characters in *Every Man Out*. There are, of course, other dimensions to Ulysses and Achilles in *Troilus and Cressida*. "Blockish" Ajax, the unconscious instrument of this attempt, is the most Jonsonian of the characters in the play. He strongly resembles one of Jonson's gulls, (e.g. Sogliardo) in being utterly stupid, vain, gullible and imitative (of Achilles) -- although even he is given an extra dimension towards the end of the play when he refuses to celebrate Achilles' killing of Hector (V.ix.5-6).[6]

There are important differences between Ulysses' scheme to 'dishumour' Achilles and Macilente's 'dishumouring' of the foolish and vain characters of *Every Man Out*. Ulysses is concerned, above all, that the Greeks should win the war. The 'dishumouring' of Achilles is seen by Ulysses as only a necessary means to this

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[6]Quotations from and references to lines in *Troilus and Cressida* are from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, textual ed. B. Evans (Boston, 1974).

end. He thinks that if Ajax can be used to"physic the great Myrmidon" (I.iii.377) of his pride and complacency, Achilles, the Greeks'foremost warrior, would be induced to fight again. In contrast, Macilente is motivated by his humour of envy at the good fortune of unworthy people.

The more important difference between these schemes, however, is that Macilente succeeds triumphantly, while Ulysses, for all his eloquence and ingenuity, fails finally to coax Achilles back to the battlefield. Macilente's success is part of what Campbell [1943:98] calls Jonson's "stiff schematism" in *Every Man Out*, while Ulysses' failure forms part of the patterns of disappointment of expectations and the failure of words to affect deeds in *Troilus and Cressida*.

Ulysses and the other Greek leaders work on Achilles by building up Ajax and by calculated coolness towards Achilles. Ulysses then follows this up with that celebrated and oft-quoted speech on Time (III iii 145-188), which is essentially a persuasive and eloquent lecture to Achilles on the transience of good reputation and the need for constant action to update this reputation. Ulysses even tries to overcome Achilles's objections to fighting on account of the latter's professed love for Polyxena by appealing to his possible future reputation in Greece:

> But it must grieve young Pyrrhus
> now at home,
> When fame shall in our island
> sound her trump
> And all the Greekish girls shall
> tripping sing,
> "Great Hector's sister did

Achilles win,
But our great Ajax bravely beat
down him".
(III.iii.209-213)

Ulysses manages to shake Achilles out of his complacency in his reputation but does not succeed in purging him of his pride. Achilles is troubled by Ulysses' words,

I see my reputation is at stake,
My fame is shrowdly gor'd
(III.ii.227-8)

and immediately expresses a desire to meet Hector after the latter's combat with Ajax. At the meeting after the abortive combat, he gives Hector a prospective butcher's scrutiny and words:

Tell me, you heavens, in which
part of his body
Shall I destroy him--whether
there, or there, or there?--
That I may give the local wound a
name,
And make distinct the very breach
whereout
Hector's great spirit flew.
Answer me, heavens!
(iv.v.242-6)

This speech expresses not only Achilles' pride and insolence but also his recognition that to regain his lost reputation, he must kill Hector. He promises to meet Hector in battle the next day, only to change his mind soon after, on receiving a letter from Queen Hecuba, reminding him of his vows to Polyxena that he would not fight (V.i.39-46). Achilles' concern for his reputation proves transitory--and weaker

than his vows to Polyxena. Ulysses' scheme therefore comes to nought and Achilles only fights after Patroclus is killed.

This abortive scheme to pluck "down Achilles' plumes" (I.iii.385) has one undesirable but very funny side-effect, summed up deliciously by Thersites:

> A' th' t' other side, the policy of those crafty swearing rascals, that stale old mouse-eaten dry cheese, Nestor, and that same dog-fox Ulysses, is not prov'd worth a blackberry. They set me up, in policy, that mongril cur, Ajax, against that dog of as bad a kind, Achilles; and now is that cur Ajax prouder than the cur Achilles, and will not arm today: ...
>
> (v.iv.9-15)

Those parts of II.iii where Ulysses, Nestor, Agamemnon and Diomedes work on Ajax ar very Jonsonian in tone, with these four co-intriguers feeding the vanity of the fool and gull while making derisory asides about him among themselves. In a similar vein is Thersites' description of the puffed-up Ajax to Achilles and Patroclus:

> Why, 'a stalks up and down like a peacock--a stride and a stand; ruminates like an hostess that hath no arithmetic but her brain to set down her reckoning; bites his lip with a politic regard, as who should say there were wit in this head and 'twould out--and so there is; but it lies as coldly

> in him as fire in a flint, which will not show without knocking.
> (*Troilus and Cressida* III.iii.251-257)

This followed by Thersites' parody of how Ajax will receive Achilles' message to him. Thersites' description of Ajax resembles, in its tone of gleeful derision, Carlo Buffone's description of Sogliardo's lesson in smoking from Shift:

> They have hir'd a chamber, and all priuate to practise in, for the making of the *Patoun*, the *Receit reciprocall*, and a number of other mysteries, not yet extent ... and there wee might see SOGLIARDO sit in a chaire, holding his snowt vp like a sow vnder an apple-tree, while th'other open'd his nostrils with a poking-sticke, to giue the smoke a more free delluerie.[7]
> (*Every Man Out* IV.iii. 88-96)

It seems to me that Shakespeare's treatment of Ulysses' unsuccessful strategem, while using several ingredients inspired by Jonson's *Every Man Out*, calls into question the effectiveness of 'dishumouring' through trickery -- the central device of *Every Man Out*. All Ulysses' eloquence and ingenuity cannot rid Achilles of his pride and insolence, or make him break his vow to Polyxena in order to redeem his

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[7]Quotations from *Every Man Out* are from *Ben Jonson*, Vol. III, ed. C. H. Herford and P. Simpson, (Oxford, 1927).

reputation. The passions of grief and revenge seem to be greater persuaders to action: an in Achilles' case, it does seem as if his love for his friend Patroclus is greater and more real than the airy vows of merely fashionable love for the distant Polyxena.

The funny side-effect of the strategem suggests strongly that Shakespeare may also be using a part of Jonson's satiric technique to laugh at Jonson. Shakespeare seems to be implying here that a 'dishumouring' attempt, in the manner of *Every Man Out*, may not only fail: it may also go haywire and inject a new 'humour' into a fool, with laughable results.

Shakespeare's Thersites may have originated from a brief description of the scurrilous railer in Book II of the *Iliad*, but Shakespeare seems to have been more influenced by Macilente and Carlo Buffone of *Every Man Out* in his depiction of this character and assignation of his role in *Troilus and Cressida*. As Foakes [1971:54] puts it, "Thersites ...combines something of the malice of Macilente and the scurrility of Carlo Buffone ...". And while Homer's Thersites is an insignificant figure who appears only once in the *Iliad*, Shakespeare's Thersites is the main satiric commentator in *Troilus and Cressida*.

Envy is Macilente's governing humour--and while Thersites seems much more driven by impotent fury at the self-destructive stupidity of men, envy is also associated with him, in utterances by himself, Achilles and Patroclus:

> I have said my prayers, and devil
> Envy say amen.
>
> (Thersites, II. iii.20-21)

> How now, thou [core] of envy?
> (Achilles, V.i.4)
>
> Why, thou damnable box of envy, thou, what means thou to curse thus? (Patroclus, V.I. 25-26)

Like Macilente, too, Thersites repeatedly wishes physical diseases upon those he considers morally diseased:

> After this, the vengeance on the whole camp! or rather, the Neapolitan bone-ache! for that methinks is the curse depending on those that war for a placket.
> (*Troilus and Cressida*, II.iii.17-20)
>
> ... Me thinkes, now, the hecticke,
> Gout, leprosie or some such loth'd disease
> Might light upon him;...
> (*Every Man Out*, I.iii.76-78)
> Macilente on Sordido

However, Thersites does this much more than Macilente: it is one of the distinguishing traits of his speech. In this, Shakespeare seems to stand on its head the formal satirists' and Jonson-Asper's claim to cure social ills through satire.

Thersites' perverse delight in dogging and observing characters at their 'folly', whether it be Diomedes' dalliance with Cressida or the "clapper-clawing" between the "wenching rogues" (V.iv.33) and "the cuckold and the

cuckold-maker" (V.vii.9), is akin to Buffone's relish in encouraging folly in Segliardo and in later railing at the 'dishumoured' and discomfited. In his use of language, also, Thersites bears a strong resemblance to Buffone, as the quotations on p. above illustrate. In fact, he can even be more scurrilous than Buffone -- and can use fewer words to more effect. None of Buffone's utterances have quite the resonance and the memorability of Thersites' "All the argument is a whore and a cuckold ..." (II.iii.72-3) or his "Lechery, lechery, still wars and lechery, nothing else holds fashion". (V.ii.194-96)

There are important differences between Thersites, on the one hand, and Macilente and Carlo on the other. Thersites is a pure observer and commentator who takes no part in the action of *Troilus and Cressida* while Jonson's two satiric commentators are also active participants in the plot of *Every Man Out*. Macilente, as has been pointed out earlier, is the chief intriguer in Jonson's play, while Buffone actively encourages Sogilardo's aspirations to become a gentleman--and later convinces him that he can even become a courtier.

Very few personal details about Thersites are given, except that he is some kind of licensed jester who has the privilege of venting his scurrility on whom he pleases and an underdog whom Ajax can beat with physical (but not verbal) impunity. In contrast, we are told that Macilente is a lean, poor scholar and a returned traveller -- while Carlo Buffone is shown as someone who relishes food, drink, women and practical jokes.

Thersites' personal motives and circumstances do not seem to matter as much as what he says. It seems to me that he is Shakespeare's quintessential satirist -- used by him not only to provide a satirical perspective on the action and character, but also to demonstrate the limitations of satirical vision and the excesses of satirical utterance. Thersites is intelligent, generally perspicacious and aphoristic -- but also bitter and vituperative. He sees through a lot of sham and is a valuable debunker: but so sceptical is he of human goodness that he is sometimes carried away into making unjustified detractions. His function in *Troilus and Cressida* is therefore more complex than the functions of Macilente and Carlo Buffone in *Every Man Out*, who are, essentially Jonson's dramatic vehicles for his satire.

Alvin Kernan's [1959:194] summing up of Thersites as being "composed only of those fundamental energies that drive the satirist" is very acute, but I cannot agree with the rest of his statement [1959:194], that those energies, unchecked, cause Thersites to arrive at "absolute pride in self and absolute loathing of all other creatures". Although none of the Greeks escapes Thersites' blistering tongue, which he also uses against Troilus, Cressida and Paris, he utters no detraction against Hector. Also, in his hierarchy of fools, he himself is included:

> Agamemnon is a fool to offer to command Achilles, Achilles is a fool to be commanded [of Agamemnon], Thersites is a fool to serve such a fool, and this Patroclus is a fool positive.
> (II.iii.62-65)

Thersites' responses to the challenges of Hector and Margarelon, respectively, in the battle scenes of Act V, show a similar vein of self-detraction:

> ... I am a rascal, a scurvy railing knave, a very filthy rogue.
>
> (V.iv.28-29)

In making Thersites excuse himself from fighting by pleading baseness of birth and character, Shakespeare is not demonstrating Thersites' cowardice, but ensuring the consistency of his character and role in the play. Thersites remains to the end a satiric commentator who takes no part in the action and will not fight a war that he has so derisively denounced. To charge him with cowardice here would be as invalid as to denounce a war correspondent for not fighting.

In Thersites' first appearance in the play (II.i) he gives utterance to some home truths in his characteristically scurrilous fashion. These utterances are made first to Ajax and then to Achilles, but they refer back to the scene immediately preceding this (I.iii). His description of Agamemnon as a "botchy core" (III.i.6) is not simply unjustified detraction of Agamemnon, or the indulgence of a sick imagination preoccupied with boils. Agamemnon, as leader of the Greek hosts, is in a sense their "core" or centre. We have seen in the preceding scene how ineffectual Agamemnon is in enacting his given role as 'centre' to the Greeks, in spite of the verbal homage paid to him by Ulysses and Nestor. He neither knows why the Greeks have so far failed to take Troy nor what to do about it. It is left to Ulysses both to provide the diagnosis and suggest a cure.

Therefore, the description of Agamemnon as a "botchy core", in the sense of ineffectual leader is justified.

Thersites' answer to Ajax's demand that he should tell him about the proclamation also hits upon a truth:

> Thou art proclaim'd fool, I think.
> (II.i.25)

The proclamation refers to Hector's challenge of single combat to one of the Greeks -- but in responding to this challenge, the Greek leaders are to carry out Ulysses' suggestion (made in the preceding scene) that they should pretend that Ajax, rather than Achilles, is their best man. The proclamation is therefore going to result in the gullible Ajax being made a fool of. Thersites also points out to Ajax the difference between Achilles and himself:

> Thou grumblest and railest every hour on Achilles, and thou art as full as envy at his greatness as Cerberus is at Proserpina's beauty ...
> (II.i.32-34)

Whoever else are going to be fooled by Ulysses' strategem, Thersites is certainly not one of them.

Later in this scene, Thersites tells Achilles:

> There's Ulysses and old Nestor, whose wit was mouldy ere [your]

> grandsires and nails [on their toes], yoke you like draught--oxen, and make you plough up the wars.
>
> (II.i.104-107)

Here he mocks the traditional opinion of Nestor as a wise old man (also expressed in the preceding scene) and views cynically the relationship between the Greek 'politicians' and soldiers. Yet Thersites' view is not really very different from Ulysses' conception of the relationship, expressed in the preceding scene:

> So that the ram that batters down
> the wall,
> For the great swinge and rudeness
> of his poise,
> They place before his hand that
> made the engine,
> Or those that with the fineness
> of their souls
> By reason guide his execution.
>
> (I.iii.206-210)

The difference is only in the imagery. 'Draught-oxen' suggests coerced stupidity, but at least animate begins. A ram, on the other hand, is merely an instrument of destruction.

As can be seen in this scene (II.i), Thersites is capable of speaking a lot of truth. I disagree, therefore, with Campbell's dismissal of him:

> The spectators as well as all the characters in the play realize that his opinions are worthless, that his sentiments are as odious as the man himself.

The Greeks may disregard everything Thersites says, only thinking him entertaining (as Achilles does), or aggravating (as Nestor, Ajax and Patroclus do) -- just as the Trojans disregard Cassandra's warnings and dismiss them as madness. But the more fool they, for doing that. Among the Greeks, only Thersites and Diomedes question the moral basis of the war, but Thersites does it more reductively and aphoristically than Diomedes:

> All the argument is a whore and a cuckold ...
>
> (II.iii.72-73)

This statement sums up memorably, for the audience and readers, the basic reasons why the Greeks, on the one hand, start the war, and the Trojans, on the other, decide not to accept Nestor's formula ("deliver Helen") for ending it. The Greeks are concerned with the honour of Menelaus (the cuckold) and the Trojans, as we see in their council scene of II.ii, are concerned with the symbolic value of Helen (the whore) to them. The war comes about as a result of the adulterous liaison of Helen and Paris--hence Thersites' juxtapositions of "war" and "lechery" in II.iii.75 and V.ii.195 in his disgust with the whole business.

Thersites reserves his lengthiest expressions of scurrilous contempt for Ajax, Menelaus, Patroclus and Diomedes. That Ajax is for the most part a fool and a gull in this play, there can be no doubt. This is communicated to us even without Thersites' help, although Thersites' contribution makes Ajax's folly appear even funnier. Menelaus is derided by nearly everyone who meets him or mentions his name in the play. He is indeed depicted as being little more than a cuckold.

However, Thersites' tirades against Patroclus and Diomedes are not quite borne out by Shakespeare's presentation of these characters in the play. Thersites' allegation that Patroclus is Achilles' "masculine whore" (V.i.17) is not confirmed by anyone else in the play -- not even by Ulysses, who in I.iii deplores Patroclus' burlesques of the Greek generals and Achilles' applause of his play-acting. Ulysses' description of the two,

> With him Patroclus
> Upon a lazy bed the livelong day
> Breaks scurril jests,
> And with ridiculous and [awkward]
> action,
> Which, slanderer, he imitation calls,
> He pageants us.
>
> (I.iii.146-151)

does not suggest a pair of homosexual lovers, but rather a pair of indolent and insubordinate detractors. That Achilles loves Patroclus very much we are left in no doubt of: Patroclus himself says so in III.iii.221 and Achilles' reaction to his death in Act V proves it. That Patroclus is effeminate we also have from his own mouth in III.iii.218. But these need not necessarily add up to a homosexual relationship between the two. After all, the young man of Shakespeare's sonnets is described in Sonnet 20 as being both womanlike and much beloved of the poet, who, however, takes great pains in this sonnet to point out the non-sexual nature of their relationship.

Thersites' insults to and curses against Patroclus in V.i,17-24 and 30-34 seem then like a waste of satirical breath -- Shakespeare's instance of the satirist letting his tongue run away with him for the sheer pleasure of uttering

witty vituperations. It is, as it were, a satirist's occupational disease that can weaken his credibility.

Thersites' comments on Diomedes are even less justified from what we see of Diomedes in the play:

> That same Diomed's a false-hearted rogue, a most unjust knave. I will no more trust him when he leers than I will a serpent when he hisses ... the sun borrows of the moon when Diomed keeps his word.
>
> (V.i.88-94)

In IV.i, Diomedes acquits himself very well both in his exchanges of compliments with Aeneas and in his intelligently forthright answer to Paris' question as to who deserve Helen best: Paris or Menelaus. He shows in this scene an appreciation of one of the ironies of war that would make people who respect each other as much as he and Aeneas do, want to kill each other--as well as an angry awareness of the cost in human lives of Helen's adultery. In IV.iv, we see him first gracefully complimenting Cressida and the expressing an impatient independence of judgement and action in response to Troilus' injunctions to him regarding Cressida:

> and know you, lord,
> I'll nothing do on charge. To her own worth
> She shall be priz'd; but that you say, "Be't so",
> I speak it in my spirit and honor, "No".
>
> (IV.iv.132-5)

In V.ii. he tries to hold Cressida to her promise to him and finally wins her mainly because he shows her clearly that he will not tolerate any "fooling" or "paltering" from her. He is also willing to fight on the battlefield for the fight to have her.

There is no indication, in all this, of any basis for Thersites' detraction of him. On the contrary, Shakespeare's portrayal of Diomedes helps to make credible Cressida's change of affections from Troilus to Diomedes. In contrast to Troilus' sighs, protestations and repeated charges to her to "be true" (an index of Troilus' insecurity?), Diomedes is his own man both in action and opinion.

Thersites' unjustified detractions of Diomedes seem to be Shakespeare's illustration of a deficiency in the satiric perspective--another occupational disease the satirist is prone to. A satirist focusses his attention so much on human vice and folly that he tends to interpret situations and characters in the worst possible light. Thersites' perspective in this play is much more limited than Shakespeare's--and does not include an understanding of the inner forces within some of the characters that lead them to act in the way they do.

Nowhere is this more apparent then in Thersites' reductive dismissal of Cressida as "... the whore there ... [and] ... the dissembling luxurious drab ..." (V.iv.6-8). Shakespeare has taken great pains to show the reasons for Cressida's infidelity to Troilus. It is rooted mainly in Cressida's conviction that

Men prize the thing ungain'd
more than it is.
That she was never yet that
ever knew
Love got so sweet as when
desire did sue.
(I.ii.289-91)

Before her tryst with Troilus, she fears betraying her love to Troilus in case he values her less for it. This may be calculation on her part, but it is calculation for self-preservation. She seems only too aware of the three stages of love or lust that Sonnet 129 speaks of:

Had, having and in quest to have ...

In the scene of her first meeting with Troilus, her declarations of love to him show an awareness of love's tenses:

Prince Troilus, I have lov'd you
night and day
For many weary months.
(III.ii.114-115)

and

I love you now, but till now not so much
But I might master it.
(III.ii.120-121)

To her, then, the act of giving herself in love to a man is seen both as an abandonment of self-mastery and a step that will result in the decrease of the man's love for her. But she gives herself, nevertheless, because she is not all that controlled or calculating -- and next morning fears that she has lost Troilus:

You men will never tarry.
O foolish Cressidi I might have
still held off,
And then you would have tarried.
(IV.ii.16-18)

Her utterances also suggest that she believes most in the present and puts little faith either in the past or the future:

Things won are done, joy's soul
lies in the doing.
(I.ii.287)

I have forgot my father,
(IV.ii.96)

It does not help matters that at their parting in IV.iv, to her questions of "When shall we see again?" (l. 57) Troilus can give no answer more specific than his oft-iterated "be true". He then warns her against the "Grecian youths" whose charms he praises in such superlatives to her, that her immediate response is:

O heavens, you love me not.
(IV.iv.82)

When such a youth, Diomedes, materialises soon after as her "guardian" and escort to the Greek tents, one would not find it too hard to believe that Cressida would be capable of switching her affections to him -- although to understand is not necessarily to approve. She is faithless partly because she has little faith in past or future and partly because the only way she can hold on to her present "guardian" Diomedes is by not holding him off. She may be sensual and flirtatious, as reflected in her bawdy jokes with Pandarus and her demeanour

before the Greek generals: but that does not mean that her love for Troilus was not genuine while it lasted.

Although there are undeniable parallels between Helen and Cressida in that they are both beautiful and unfaithful women, there are also important differences in Shakespeare's presentation of them. Helen is the cause of the war: Cressida is pawn. Helen seems totally unconcerned about her infidelity or its effects: Cressida is full of self-blame, but acknowledges her weakness. Helen is married to Menelaus, but Troilus does not even mention marriage to Cressida. In fact, Troilus hardly protests in IV.ii when Aeneas informs him that Cressida must be exchanged for Antenor. At this moment of crisis in his love life, Troilus shows a surprising concern in maintaining the secrecy of his affair with Cressida:

> ... and, my Lord Aeneas,
> We met by chance; you did not
> find me here.
>
> (IV.ii.70-71)

The protests are left to Pandarus and Cressida.

Cressida can only be said to be a "whore" to the extent that she is wanton and faithless, but she is certainly not a "whore" of the same order as Helen, the self-indulgent adulteress. Thersites' comments on Cressida in V.iv.6-8, therefore, show an ignorance of the complex reality of Cressida's character and circumstances -- and demonstrate another limitation of the satiric vision.

Macilente and Carlo Buffone, Jonson's dramatic satirists in *Every Man Out*, are together used by Jonson to expose, comment upon,

deride and finally 'dishumour' the follies and pretensions of his humour characters. Whatever the flaws in their respective personalities and motivation, we can be reasonably certain that their opinions of their 'victims' correspond to Jonson's -- and that the 'dishumouring' they bring about accomplish Asper-Jonson's proclaimed intention to

> Squeeze out the humour of such
> spongie natures,
> As licke vp euery idle vanitie.
> (Introduction, 145-6)

Ulysses' strategem in *Troilus and Cressida* seems to have been influenced by several elements from *Every Man Out*, but its ultimate failure suggests Shakespeare's questioning of the effectiveness of 'dishumouring' through trickery as a device for reforming men and moving them to desirable action. Shakespeare recognises that men are more intractable than the humour characters of *Every Man Out* -- and not so easily 'purged' of their dominant characteristics.

Shakespeare's Thersites, who combines of the qualities of Jonson's Macilente and Carlo Buffone, is Shakespeare's illustration of the use and abuse of satire. In places, Thersites' comments are particularly acute and penetrating -- but he is made to undermine his own credibility elsewhere by inaccurate and indiscriminate detractions. This seems to me to be Shakespeare's recognition that a satirist's utterances have only limited validity, because his obsession with negative aspects of human behaviour and his habit of railing to entertain and disgust, may drive him to excess. In using Thersites' perspective as only one of several in the play, Shakespeare is not only refining on

Jonson's technique in *Every Man Out*, but also questioning whether a satirist as bitter as Macilente and as given to scurrility as Buffone, may always be trusted as a commentator.

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## FOR OSEL HITA

by

Leonard Jeyam

When Cleopatra slighted her salad days,
Didn't somebody tell her that youth
Speaks of all possibilities,
And the vitality that was hers
Even then existed?
Didn't she know that even in innocence
She was made of the stuff of poetry?

Actually, I'm thinking of you,
Your poetic heartbeat pulsing,
Amazing the world with such exuberance;
And there's also another, but sadly
Whose fire of youth sparked his own tragic end.
Nika, tell them what we already know:
That a child shall lead us all.

## POEM

for Lee Tzu Pheng

by

Leonard Jeyam

We were all children long ago
With the grass being greener then,
And the rain only falling on naughty days.

We are still children today,
But the green's a withered brown
With the continual threat of rain.

# WINDROCK

by

Anne Fairbairn

Eyeless sockets in a skull of stone
Questions the stars' geometry.
A tongueless mouth dry with grit
Denies creation's mystery.
Bloodless wounds bound in shadows
Bleed for the day that is to come.
Tonight a Guernican agony
Moans above the restless sea.

No double-helix mars this stone
Which holds time-shaped integrity.
Spume tastes bitter on my lips
As I crouch within uncertainty.
On this wind-carved rock, defined by the moon,
Is a ravaged face of doubt -- my own.
Slowly darkness drifts away;
The windrock meets a salt-edged day.

# REVIEW

By

Wong Ming Yook

Robert Yeo, *The Adventures of Holden Heng*, Singapore: Heinemann Asia, 1986. ix + 168.

Robert Yeo's first novel, *The Adventures of Holden Heng* (Heinemann Asia, 1986), exploits a common theme -- the journey of a young man into maturity. Written in a humorous vein, the humour nevertheless accentuates rather than detracts from the sadness present in the inevitable passing of innocence. The main character, Holden Heng, is a touching portrayal of the 'hero' who cannot quite understand what is expected of him. Ambitiously named after the late great William Holden by his father, Holden Heng seemed destined to take the female world by storm. However, at twenty four, he is a "belated adolescent", still virginal and confused over the matter of sex.

Gauche and unsophisticated, Holden embarks, at the opening of the novel, on a journey which takes him through three love affairs in one year: firstly, with Siew Fung, whom he loves, but who has unfortunate religious leanings and wants to become a nun; secondly, a torrid liaison with Nanette, the half-French nymphomaniac who seduces him; and thirdly, with Kim, the Americanised Asian feminist who unceremoniously pushes him down the slope of Mt. Faber when he kisses her.

Not too faroff in the background is Holden's best friend, the worldly wise Raymond who dispenses liberal doses of his wisdom to Holden, and provides much of the humour in the novel. The characterization of Holden and Raymond are nicely done: Holden typifies the conservative Asian male while Raymond reminds us of the worldly wise businessman with his fixed and somewhat unflattering view of women. His confidence in the image of himself as "manly" coupled with his convivial manner, make him an effect foil for Holden's naivete and ignorance of matters sexual. One cannot help but feel that Raymond gets his just desserts when he finally treads the narrow path of fidelity dogmatically laid down by his new girlfriend, the feminist Kim.

The bulk of Raymond's advice on how to behave with females ranges from "Treat her as taboo" to a mini dissertation on young Asian feminists, all of which confuses Holden more than it enlightens him. However, life demands that the innocent mature, and Holden Heng does finally mature, despite, or rather because of, the emotional battering he endures through his love affairs.

The novel closes on a touching note as Holden mourns the passing of his innocence, which ends when his affair with Siew Fung ends. There is an element of hope in the concluding paragraph, however, which suggests that Holden realizes that acceptance of all things imperfect marks the first step towards maturity. He quotes from Wallace Stevens the one line which sums everything up for him: "Death is the mother of Beauty, mystical."

As a first novel, ***The Adventures of Holden Heng*** stays on safe ground, exploring a

sure theme and not too complex characters. While it lacks the polish later novels tend to have, *The Adventures of Holden Heng* nevertheless has something to be said for it. "Humorous" and "moving" are some adjectives appropriate in describing it. Not exactly heavyweight but not lightweight either, it has a tight enough plot and interestingly delineated characters to hold the reader's attention from start to finish.